W. D. A

N° 6

5

A RHAPSODY.

By a FREEMAN.

HAVING no anxiety about the reception my thoughts may meet with, I am determined to be at no pains about their order or arrangement, but ſhall give them to the reader in the ſame ſcattered and irregular manner they occurred to myſelf.

I ſhall begin with a preliminary obſervation, the juſtneſs of which I believe cannot eaſily be conteſted; and it is this, That the royal burghs in North Britain are regulated in all matters, whether relating to the domeſtic government of the community, or the privilege of repreſentation, upon principles unfavourable to liberty. The conſtitution of all of them received a form, in days when this unhappy country was diſtracted by internal commotions, and engaged in the invaſion or repulſion of a foreign enemy. Hence it is, that however well calculated their charters may be, to have kept the inhabitants under that meaſure of ſubjection and controul, which the unſettled ſtate of the times in general, the frequent and ſudden alarms of the Sovereign, and the diſtruſt he had in his people, rendered requiſite, none of them breathe in any ſenſe that ſpirit of liberty which prevails, or can ſtand a compariſon with the feelings of independence enjoyed by the people in our ſiſter-kingdom.

The influence naturally falling to the ſhare of moſt other burghs, bears no proportion to that which this metropolitan city is intitled to claim in the ſcale of national importance. Sequeſtered many of them from a general intercourſe by ſituation, limited in their intereſt, and inconſiderable in regard to trade, they have not any very powerful motives to attempt a reformation in their municipal laws. But here every conſideration, which is an apology for other burghs remaining at under, operates in a contrary

direction. The ſingle circumſtance of its being the *metropolis*, the number and opulence of its natural inhabitants, the vaſt concourſe of people from every quarter that reſort to and reſide in it, the diſpenſation of juſtice by the ſupreme judicatures of the country within its walls for one half of the year, the high character of its learned and crowded univerſity, the great progreſs of the arts, the elegance of private life, the liberality of ſentiment, and literature of converſation, by which it is diſtinguiſhed, all conſpire to raiſe it greatly above the level of moſt other places, in the minds and eſtimation of mankind.

Such a wonderful concurrence of important circumſtances, ſufficient to attract and engage the attention, muſt give weight and authority to any ſcheme or reſolution, ſupported by the prevailing ſentiments of ſo reſpectable a body of people; and that not only in matters by which their particular intereſts may be more immediately affected, but alſo in every meaſure of government in which the country in general is concerned. Indeed the numerous ranks and orders of men juſt now mentioned, have not directly any voice in many of the objects of public concern; yet the adminiſtration of the town, when they wanted its reſolutions to have their full influence, were always of uſe, until of late, to pay a proper attention and regard to what they knew to be the impreſſions and opinions of men intitled to reſpect from their characters, high ſtations, and the great utility they were of to the community of the burgh. But, for ſome time paſt, matters have been conducted upon a narrower ſcale; and an illiberal junto has taken upon them to determine reſpecting every thing, whether of a public or private nature, without conſulting or liſtening to people of influence, information, and knowledge; from whoſe countenance and protection alone they could derive weight to their deliberations, and efficacy to their reſolves.

If ſuch men ought not to be excluded from the government of our affairs, is ſubmitted to the candour of every unprejudiced reader. If they are permitted to remain in it, to the mortification of having been already degraded by them, we muſt add the humiliating proſpect of ſinking in character and importance below the meaneſt burgh that ever ſent a repreſentative to parliament.

Theſe obſervations may ſuffice to ſhow how incumbent it is upon every one, whoſe ſituation calls him to deliberate what hands the

BRITISH MUSEUM

the adminiſtration of the city ſhould be intruſted to, to be poſſeſſed with proper notions of his rights and privileges,— the beſt ſecurity againſt the fatal effects of natural careleſſneſs, and the intereſted views of deſigning men. After people from the beginning improper, have been elected into power, mankind need not be either ſurpriſed or enraged at their abuſing it; it would rather be the ſource of aſtoniſhment if they did not. The perſons by whom they are exalted to ſtations, the important duties of which it might have been foreſeen they were unwilling or unqualified to fulfil, are alone anſwerable to the injured community, and the diſappointed public. Shameful negligence, or a miſtaken ſecurity, (for I ſhould be ſorry to aſcribe it to cauſes more degenerate in the incorporations of the town), have been the occaſion, for years paſt, of men being introduced into the adminiſtration, unfitted by nature, unimproved by education, needy in their circumſtances, and illiberal in their minds.

The preſent leading ones, whoſe pretenſions to preferment are no better than thoſe of their adherents, to accompliſh their own ſelfiſh views, firſt formed this ſyſtem of ſlaviſh politics, and have followed it forth hitherto with a perſeverance and effrontery peculiar to themſelves.——Compoſed as the incorporations are, moſtly of ſober-minded and induſtrious citizens, whoſe daily labours for the good of their families can ſpare little time in the courſe of the year to think upon the remoter intereſt of the public, it is matter of no great ſurpriſe that they ſhould be miſled by the vain and deceitful repreſentations of people, who, leaving the paths in which they ought ever to have trod, find advantage in making politics their profeſſion. —— The ſudden acquiſition of wealth, though by a perſon who wants ſenſe to perceive that a man may with greater facility become rapidly rich than permanently reſpected and powerful, is a fit ſubject to be laid hold of by ſuch adventurers. A few flattering deſcriptions of the ſhining advantages to be derived from the poſſeſſion of wealth, of the great connections it had enabled the family of the owner to form, of the influence he had been permitted to gain by it in the ſtate, his diſregard for money, his attachment to his friends, and his deſire to ſerve them, compoſe a group of conſiderations ſo bewitching, that there is no wonder they ſhould gain the attention of honeſt and unſuſpicious hearers. To this new created being were attributed, by theſe forgers of our chains, every amiable endowment

and

and every cardinal virtue that ever diſtinguiſhed and adorned the moſt ſplendid characters in ancient or modern times. Theſe arts, and ſuch as theſe, produced the deſired effect.

They dazzled the eyes of people in general, perplexed many, ſilenced others, overcame and miſled not a few; the reſult of the whole was, the community at large being lulled into a dangerous ſecurity. A current in itſelf neither deep nor powerful, may commit miſchief, if its motions are not watched, and its firſt encroachments attended to. In like manner, while the ſtream of Edinburgh politics ſeemed to be flowing in a tranquil and harmleſs ſtate, it was artfully diverted into a courſe, by which the foundations and defences of our rights and privileges have been undermined and overturned. Naturally vain, and intoxicated with the conſciouſneſs of opulence ſuddenly acquired, it was no wonder he was delighted with the proſpect of adding to it an honour, which might be the means of raiſing his perſonal character in the minds of people nearer upon a footing with his immenſe wealth. An offer of the repreſentation of the metropolis of his own country, under aſſurances that he was invited to it by the voice of the inhabitants, was an event of ſuch ſingular good fortune, as excited a ſtrong ſenſe of gratitude to *him* by whom it had been principally atchieved, and for a little made his breaſt glow with ſome emotions favourable to the intereſt of his conſtituents to be, in their political capacity. The firſt has indeed been amply rewarded; but his elevation has not rendered his ſentiments a bit more liberal with reſpect to us, or reformed in any degree his primeval meanneſs and vulgarity, which he ſtill retains in ſpite of his unnatural preferment. The honour and the intereſt of the town has been entirely neglected, and the freedom and independence of her citizens diſputed and oppoſed by both.

One of theſe gentlemen perhaps learned laſt war, and has adopted the principle, of making ſure of the commanding officer, and you will have little to fear from the troops under his charge.

The love of diſtinction and pre-eminence is natural to man; and few can reſiſt the temptation, when offered, of being raiſed to a rank above that of their fellow-citizens. To be elected one of the magiſtrates or governors of this metropolis, in the free and independent way their election ought to be conducted, is ſuch a mark of reſpect, that men of the firſt note and beſt abilities among us

need

need not be aſhamed to deſire it.——The ſtation in itſelf is highly honourable; and the duties annexed to it will, by a perſon who values his character, be diſcharged with chearfulneſs and fidelity. The littleneſs of party-conſiderations, ſecret animoſities, or private attachments, will never once be permitted to come within his view. The deſire of being uſeful to the public, the approbation of his conſtituents, and to act ſo as to deſerve it, are the objects that will engage his attention. One, from what he beholds juſt now, would be led to conclude, a revolution had taken place in the conſtitution of human reaſon, and that thoſe qualities that formerly intitled the poſſeſſors to diſtinction and honour, had loſt their value in the eſtimation of men; and that recommendations of another ſort, the enumeration of which would be as diſagreeable as it would ſerve no purpoſe at preſent, have been brought into repute, and become the forerunners of friendſhip with the rich, and preferment in the community. The time has been (and I flatter myſelf will again return) when the government was exerciſed by men nearly approaching in character to the portrait I before deſcribed; of minds enlarged by ſuitable education, liberal in their ſentiments, polite in their manners, anxious for the honour of the community; men by nature diſintereſted, fair and candid in their intercourſe, ſteady and manly in their conduct, the promoters of every public-ſpirited inſtitution, the encouragers of every charitable endowment, the patrons of every ſcheme for the improvement and ornament of the metropolis. From a life which was a continued exertion of diſintereſtedneſs and public ſpirit, as one inſtance out of hundreds that might be given, let the glory of an *infirmary*, the bleſſing of which Britain feels, draw the tribute of a tear to the memory of Mr Drummond? Where is the uſeful inſtitution or public monument that ſpeaks to L——e's praiſe? What eye will be wet when he is no more?

The ſituation of the citizens is now become truly deplorable, and the danger to which the community is expoſed great and imminent. The deſcription I have given of the duties incumbent upon men intruſted with the adminiſtration, and of the high character they have it in their power to acquire and maintain, ſeem not to come within the line which the preſent rulers have chalked out for their conduct. It has been reported, and I'm afraid with too much truth, that in looking about for perſons to ſupply the

places that become vacant in the council at next Michaelmas, thoſe who have had propoſals made them on that head never once were aſked ſuch queſtions as theſe: Have you leiſure, on account of your own buſineſs or employment, to be a magiſtrate or member of council? Will you diſcharge the duties of thoſe functions with diligence and fidelity? Are you determined, in your judicial capacity, to render juſtice between man and man? Will you permit no private intereſt or party-matter to lead you aſtray? Will you promote the freedom, and do what lies in your power to enlarge the privileges of your conſtituents? Will every proper ſcheme for the improvement of the city meet with your ſupport? and will the honour and intereſt of the community be always at your heart?

It has alſo been reported, that while thoſe queſtions have been omitted which ought to have been put, others have been ſubſtituted in their room which ought not; and that the ordinary method of opening their propoſals is much to this effect.

We have long looked upon you as one of our friends, and ſhould be extremely grieved to find it otherwiſe. We expect you are of a peaceable diſpoſition, and a temper that hates innovations and diſturbance: we wiſh matters to go on as they have hitherto done, tamely and quietly: we have long intended, ſo ſoon as an opportunity offered, to ſhow ſome marks of our regard for you; and as all our intereſts depend upon friends ſticking together like men, without allowing themſelves to be impoſed upon by vain and plauſible pretences of any kind, we have now come to the reſolution of exerting our beſt endeavours to have you brought into the management of the town's affairs: every thing depends upon being ſtanch and ſteady; and therefore, before we exert our friendſhip farther in your behalf, we want to know, from yourſelf, if we can DEPEND upon you, without more words: we have no doubt you underſtand what we mean.

In this emphatic word DEPEND every thing is comprehended; and if the anſwer is made in the affirmative, the perſon who gives it is marked down as one upon whom they can *ride the water*, as they call it.

What a ſhameful picture this is, if drawn from the life? and happy would it be for us all if it had no exiſtence but in imagination.

The moſt certain marks of the degeneracy of the times, and

the

the decline of morals, are the corruption of judges, and others in authority, upon whoſe uprightneſs, integrity, impartiality, and candour, every thing that is dear to individuals, or the public, muſt ſtand or fall; and whatever may have been the caſe in other burghs, whoſe intereſts as a community, and importance in the ſtate, is trifling when compared to ours, I am confident it has ſeldom been ſurmiſed, and far leſs believed, that men would become ſo deſperate, and loſt to every ſenſe of character, as to think of propoſitions to others, which no honeſt man could either make or liſten to.

The town of Edinburgh has always more recruiting parties in it than any other place, and the officers belonging to them beat up fairly, when they inliſt only thoſe who accede to the articles of war. But it is a thing entirely new, and I believe ſcarcely ever heard of before, for a magiſtracy, not impaired like a regiment by honourable ſervice, to attempt the keeping up of their numbers by reinforcements of men ſeduced into their ſervice by fallacious promiſes, and diſguiſed terms of unlimited ſubmiſſion and allegiance. Without any metaphor, it terminates in this, that whatever citizen conſents to receive their aſſiſtance in bringing about his election as a member of the council, is from that moment held and ranked by them as a perſon bound and obliged to ſtick by them at all events, and on all occaſions. This is the meaning of the engagement, or it has no meaning at all. Indeed experience has confirmed what report has now only ſuggeſted. No man can foreſee what occurrences may happen in the courſe of the year. Events may take place, arduous and difficult for them whoſe duty it is to examine and decide upon; events in which not only his own incorporation, and himſelf as an individual, but alſo the intereſt of the community in general is concerned.

In ſuch a ſituation, no man who has allowed himſelf ſeriouſly to reflect upon the engagements he may be ſolicited to come under, but muſt feel a very great degree of uneaſineſs and perplexity. To bind one's ſelf to pay no attention to any meaſure on its own account, but the perſons only by whom it is propoſed; to engage to hear and decide upon property, not upon principles of right and wrong, but according to the countenances of friendſhip and hoſtility in the parties; to come under obligations without inquiring into, or underſtanding the matter in diſpute; to guide our conduct according to the features of approbation or diſpleaſure

ſure of one or two men, who have this ſingle object in view, the maintenance of their own authority, or rather deſpotiſm in the ſtate,—is, in my humble opinion, ſuch a ſhameful degree of ſubſerviency, abſolute ſubmiſſion, and thraldom, that it would fill any man of ſpirit with the emotions of a generous indignation and reſentment to whom ſuch propoſals had been offered, and every one regarding morality or religion by whom they had been liſtened or agreed to, with horror and contrition.

To conclude upon this branch: Above all things, I beſeech you to guard againſt raſh and precipitate engagements. Let not the near proſpect of wiſhed-for elevation and honour open your unguarded hearts ſo far as to bring you under obligations that may deſtroy your peace of mind, and lead your conſciences aſtray. Remember that it is not your own intereſt alone, but the welfare and proſperity of thouſands, that your conduct may affect. There are many arts of ſeduction fatal to unſuſpicious minds, beſide the direct ones of venality and corruption. From theſe there is not much to fear. When a perſon makes an open attack, and wants to knock you down, I have no doubt but you have courage and manhood ſufficient to reſiſt and to defeat it; but it is the inſinuating addreſs of deſigning men, the upright and unſuſpecting diſpoſitions natural to moſt of you, that alarms my fears, and makes me dread your danger.

Much noiſe has been made by the preſent unpopular uſurpers of the adminiſtration, about the power and influence in parliament which a certain rich man commands by his wealth. To enter upon topics that dip into private characters, may perhaps be in a great degree improper on any occaſion; but when the perſonal importance of men as individuals, is dragged into political diſcuſſions by thoſe of their own party, no perſon can be blamed of different ſentiments from them, when he endeavours to explain and obviate their miſrepreſentations. On this occaſion, I am certain, I ſhould not have given myſelf the trouble, if I did not perceive a uſe attempted to be made of this circumſtance, and arguments to be founded upon it, unfair in themſelves, and dangerous to our efforts for freedom from our preſent odious ſubjection and controul. It is true, that riches has been long the object of moſt profound veneration to our preſent rulers. Among them it ſeems to be a principle, That when a perſon is become rich, he is able to do every thing; and that juſtice and generoſity, reaſon itſelf,

itſelf, and character, may, by dint of money, be made the ſubjects of traffic, and purchaſed, as other commodities, by the higheſt bidder. Such a principle, I aver, is founded only in the corruption of human nature; and, in the next place, I deny, that, in the preſent inſtance, it is ſupported by fact.

Whatever ſcraps (they can go by no other name when compared to the magnificent object vanity ſuggeſted) this rich man may have obtained for his minions and dependents, it is very well known, that, notwithſtanding all his unremitted application and importunity, he has hitherto been defeated and diſappointed in the thing which was the laſt object of his wiſhes, and perſonal to himſelf. He indeed has been honoured with the privilege of prefixing three letters to his original name; and ſo have many others, without a thouſand a-year, or a ſeat in parliament. It is abſurd to vaunt of a perſon's influence in government, who, at one period, with eight or nine dead votes, as I am told, at his heels, has not been able to do greater things than to work out the gift of a few ordinary offices to ſome of his neareſt relations and friends.

Rank and dignities were originally the rewards of virtuous actions and gallant atchievements; and the noble deſcendents of brave anceſtors muſt feel a generous pride and indignation, when they ſee thoſe honours arrogantly ſolicited by men who never performed any exploit worthy of ſuch applauſe as intitles it to be tranſmitted to poſterity. Opulence, no doubt, will go great lengths any where: but I know no place, ſo far as affects character and reſpect, where it has leſs influence than in the great aſſembly of the nation. In the eſtimation of that exalted and liberal-minded body of men, it is not riches, but ability, integrity, knowledge, and eloquence, that commands attention, and excites reſpect. Simple votes have their value, when noſes come to be counted: but when a man of fortune and opulence wants to ſhow away in this line to advantage, he ought, before he ventures upon the career of ſtate, to be either himſelf qualified, or provided with ſuch ſupports, without which, the counted number of his votes will contribute but little to his ſplendor and proſperity. In ſhort, the poſſeſſor of political powers, as it is called, will never be treated with ſuitable attention and reſpect, unleſs he can either ſhow them of himſelf to advantage in public aſſemblies, or will truſt them to the exertions of ſome able-headed and well-tongued

friend. This, it is reported, was once in ſome people's power; and how it came to be put out of it, they can beſt tell. There was a period, when, by proper management, and ſubmiſſion to good counſel, ſuch ſolid advantages might have been reaped, as would have beſtowed an energy and importance upon every ſcheme, ſuperior to what the moſt ſanguine wiſhes could have expected. The time is now paſt, never to be regained; ſo we muſt jog up-hill in a heavy-conſtructed vehicle, bedaubed and beplaiſtered with painting, gilding, and wild beaſts; ſtruggling to attain a ſummit which will be ever in view, and always out of reach.

To having loſt the ſupport of one of the ableſt men in Britain, ſucceeded the infatuation of differing with the moſt ſenſible and prudent private friend any man ever had. His good ſenſe firſt ſuggeſted the ſcheme, by which the whole of an immenſe fortune was acquired. His advice, if it had been followed, would have ſaved the half of it. He is now gone, and, returning good for evil, has, by the appointment of an heir, in the moſt Chriſtian and delicate manner, expreſſed the lively ſenſe he felt of his friend's folly and ingratitude.

While parliamentary influence is evidently upon the decline, increaſing unpopularity follows with ſpeed. It may be aſked, for it is a fair queſtion, How would a certain rich man's intereſt ſtand among the citizens of Edinburgh upon the event of a poll-election? I would lay all his fortune, if I had it, to a ſixpence, that he would ſhew as bad a face on that occaſion, as his adherents did in the election of the maſter and aſſiſtants to the Merchant Company. But it muſt be confeſſed, that he ſeems determined to fight it to the ſtumps; for it is well known, that when neceſſity requires, the old and the lame men fallen back and forgotten, nay even the companions of the dead, are dragged out to ſupport his intereſt. It is reported, that lately, in an unimportant queſtion in the Merchant Company, in which he was afraid his adherents would be defeated, a man wrapped in flannel, did, *Chatham* like, ſtretch forth his gouty arm, but not in his country's cauſe, to ſave his intereſt; nay, acting in ſome meaſure by military force, if one in the town-guard can be ſaid to follow a military profeſſion, a perſon of that number, who could in no ſenſe come under the appellation of a *merchant*, was forced to ſhow his face, and vote as his conſtituents directed. The janitor of the high ſchool, in the ſame manner,

on

on this occaſion, received an unexpected ſummons from peace and obſcurity; and to crown all, the keeper of mortcloths, who, by accepting that office, had no doubt given over thoughts of future traffick, and expected to profit more by the dead than by the living, was obliged to forſake his darkſome cell, the church-yard, and the bones of our forefathers, and once more ſteal himſelf into a public aſſembly; where we may ſuppoſe his principal entertainment would be, taking a review of the countenances around him, in order to mark down in his kalendar of probable departures, the name of each perſon in rotation as he expected them to drop.

There is no epithet, either acrimonious or humiliating, that has not been beſtowed upon ſuch of us as have attempted to make any effort for the redreſs of our grievances, and the extenſion of our privileges; and a Noble Perſonage in the neighbourhood has been openly accuſed of degrading himſelf and his rank, in condeſcending to give his countenance to meetings of reſpectable citizens, which the preſent junto are pleaſed to inſult by the name of a *mob*. The generoſity of that great man's diſpoſitions, and feelings of his heart, are ſuch, that they will never permit his high ſtation to interfere with the exertions of juſtice and humanity. The lamentable hiſtory of our preſent ſufferings he is acquainted with, and pities us for; and would be happy, if his aſſiſtance and protection ſhould in any degree be ſerviceable to accompliſh our relief from oppreſſion, and the injurious treatment we receive from our preſent governors.

A dignified lawyer has alſo been publicly threatened to be called to account, for being inſtrumental in diſturbing the peace of ſociety, which, by the duty of his office, he was bound to preſerve. This gentleman is too high-minded to be affected with ſuch fooliſh ſcurrility. Without depreciating the merit of his predeceſſors in the high office he holds, it may be ſaid with truth, that our ſovereign never had a better ſervant; and his amiable deportment, in every ſituation of private life, is not a bit outſhone by his public character. It is to ſuch men as theſe that we ought in all our difficulties and diſtreſs to truſt for aid and protection; by which, and the juſtice of our country, we have the happy proſpect of ſoon becoming *free men*, in the true meaning of the word.

A FREEMAN.

Edinburgh, 9th September 1777.

BRITISH MUSEUM
6 DE 83